



September 23, 2005

To: Health Care Providers in Douglas County

From: Adi M. Pour, Ph.D., Health Director

Re: Norovirus implicated in school outbreak of gastrointestinal illness

The Douglas County Health Department, in conjunction with school officials, announced today that laboratory testing has implicated Norovirus in the outbreak of gastrointestinal illness at Fire Ridge Elementary School in Elkhorn, NE. To date, approximately 75 of the 290 individuals attending or working at the school have been reported to the Douglas County Health Department as ill.

Fire Ridge school officials reported the outbreak to the Douglas County Health Department on Wednesday, September 21<sup>st</sup>, when over 60 children either reported in as ill or were sent home early in the day with gastrointestinal symptoms. The Health Department interviewed parents of the ill children on Wednesday evening as a part of the epidemiologic investigation.

Health Department staff analyzed the information obtained from the interviews and the symptoms, onset dates, and possible incubation periods indicated that Norovirus could be the potential etiologic agent of the outbreak. In response, the Douglas County Health Department requested that the Nebraska Public Health Laboratory expedite testing for the virus on clinical specimens collected during the course of the investigation.

The predominant symptoms reported among ill individuals were vomiting (82%), stomach cramps (80%), nausea (79%), and fatigue (74%). Diarrhea (42%), fever (39%), chills (37%), myalgias (29%) and headache (28%) were also reported. Ninety three percent of the individuals had onset of illness on Tuesday, September 20<sup>th</sup> or Wednesday, September 21<sup>st</sup>. Eight clinical specimens were collected for laboratory testing and four have been reported as positive for Norovirus. Further epidemiologic analysis of the data implicated lunch served on Monday, September 19<sup>th</sup> (OR 17.95, 95% confidence interval 2.07-402.00, p=0.0008).

Norovirus infections cause nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and stomach cramps in infected individuals. The illness is usually brief and lasts for only one or two days. The virus can be transmitted by eating contaminated food, through hand to mouth transfer after touching surfaces or objects contaminated with the virus and by having direct contact with another person who is infected with the virus.

If you have questions or need further information, please contact the Douglas County Health Department Epidemiology Section at 444-7214 during regular business hours or at 444-7000 on evenings and weekends.

Information about Norovirus can also be found at:  
[http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/submenus/sub\\_norwalk.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/submenus/sub_norwalk.htm)